
THE BISHOP OF WORCESTER'S

S E R M O N

B E F O R E

THE HOUSE OF LORDS,

ON MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 1786.

Being the Anniverfary of KING CHARLES'S MARTYRDOM.

Die Lunæ, 6° Februarii, 1786.

ORDERED, by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, in Parliament assembled, That the Thanks of this House be, and are hereby, given to the Lord Bishop of Worcester, for the Sermon by him preached before this House, on Monday last, in the Abbey Church, Westminster; and he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

ASHLEY COWPER,

Cler. Parliamentor.

12 F.m.
20.
A
S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE HOUSE OF LORDS,

IN THE
ABBAY CHURCH OF WESTMINSTER,

ON MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 1786,

BEING

The Anniversary of KING CHARLES'S MARTYRDOM.

K. Hurd
BY RICHARD, LORD BISHOP OF
WORCESTER.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.

MDCCLXXXVI.

S E R M O N

PREACHED BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE LORD BISHOP OF

WORMSLEY



BY RICHARD LORD BISHOP OF

WORMSLEY

LONDON

PRINTED FOR T. CROFT IN THE STRAND

MDCCLXXII

S E R M O N, &c.

I St. PETER, ii. 16.

AS FREE, AND NOT USING YOUR LIBERTY FOR A CLOAK OF
MALICIOUSNESS, BUT AS THE SERVANTS OF GOD.

CHRISTIANITY, while it provides, chiefly, for the
future interests of men, by no means overlooks their
present; but is, indeed, studious to make it's followers
as happy in both worlds, as they are capable of being.

As an instance of this beneficent purpose, we may observe,
that the religion of Jesus is most friendly to the **CIVIL AND
RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES** of mankind.

B

There

There is something in the constitution of our nature, which leads men to expect, and even claim, as much independence on the will and caprice of each other, as the ends of society, and the form of government, under which they live, will permit.

Agreeably to these instincts, or conclusions of reason, call them which you will, the Gospel, both in it's genius and precepts, invites it's professors to the love and cultivation of LIBERTY. It allows the freedom of private judgment, in which the essence of *religious* liberty consists: And it indulges our natural love of *civil* liberty, not only by giving an express preference* to it, before a state of slavery, when by just and lawful means we can obtain it; but, also, by erecting our thoughts, and giving us higher notions of the value and dignity of human nature (now redeemed by so immense a price, as the blood of the lamb of God), and consequently by representing a servile condition as more degrading and dishonourable to us, than, on the footing of mere reason, we could have conceived.

But now this great indulgence of heaven, like every other, is liable to be misused; and was, in fact, so misused even in the early times, when this indulgence of the Gospel to the natural feelings of men was, with the Gospel itself, first notified and declared. For the zealot Jews, full of theocratic ideas, were forward to conclude, that their Christian privileges absolved them from obedience to *civil government*: And the believing

* 1 Cor. vii. 21—24.

Gentiles (who had not the Jewish prejudices to mislead them) were yet unwilling to think that the Gospel had not, at least, set them free from *domestic slavery*; which was the too general condition of those converts in their heathen state.

These notions, as they were not authorized by Christianity (which made no immediate and direct change in the politic and personal condition of mankind), so, if they had not been opposed and discountenanced, would have given great scandal to the ruling powers in every country, where the Christians resided, and have very much obstructed the propagation of the Christian faith.

The holy Spirit, therefore, to guard the rising Church from these mischiefs, saw fit, by the Apostle Peter, to admonish both the Jewish and Gentile converts to conduct themselves, as *free men*, indeed, so far as they were, or could honestly contrive to become, free (for that their religion no way disallowed); but not, as *misusing* the liberty, they had, or might have (which every principle of their religion, as well as prudence, forbade). *As free*, says he, *and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness*: As if he had said, “ Be careful to observe a due mean in this matter: Maintain your just liberties; yet so, as not to gratify your malignant passions under pretence of discharging that duty.” And the better to secure the observance of this precept, he adds—*but as the servants of God*—that is, “ Remember ye are so to employ your liberty as never to forget the service ye owe to God; who, in the present instance, commands you to *obey Magistrates*, that is, to submit yourselves to the govern-

ment, under which ye live, *not only for wrath*, for fear of punishment, *but for conscience sake.*"

And this caution, so guarded by religious, as well as moral considerations, was the more important, because no word is so fascinating to the common ear, as that of *Liberty*, while the few only know what it means; and the many, of all ranks, in all times, mistake it for *licence*.

And well had it been if this warning voice of the holy Apostle, which sunk deep into the hearts of the first Christians, had continued to make the same impression on the whole Christian world; which, unhappily, has contemned, or at least neglected it, in almost all ages; but never more remarkably, than in those disastrous days, which the present solemnity calls upon us to recollect, and lament.

1. The great quarrel of the times, I speak of, was opened with the cry of RELIGIOUS LIBERTY; not without reason, it must be confessed, yet with an ill grace in the complainants; who certainly would have denied to others what they so peremptorily, and indeed with too much petulance, demanded for themselves.

The source of this evil (to do justice to all sides) is to be sought in the Reformation itself; which, when it had succeeded in its great view of cleansing Religion from the corruptions of popery, concluded that no man could have reason, thenceforth, to dissent from the national church; and that an universal conformity

conformity to its discipline and doctrine was to be exacted. The conclusion was natural enough in their situation ; and the benefit of such conformity, past dispute. But it was not considered, that differences *will* arise, many times, without reason ; and, when they do, that force is not the proper way to compose them. This oversight continued long, and had terrible effects. It kept the Protestants of all denominations from entertaining just ideas of *Toleration* ; the *last* great point of reformed religion, which was clearly understood, and perhaps the *only* one of real moment in which the extraordinary persons, whom Providence raised up to be the conductors of *our* Reformation, were deficient.

In this state of things, it unfortunately happened that the Reformation was suddenly checked by the return of Popery, which forced many pious and eminent men to take refuge in the Protestant churches abroad ; where they grew enamoured of certain forms of church-government, different from those that prevailed at home ; and which, on their subsequent return, they fanatically strove to obtrude on their brethren, and to erect, under the new name of THE DISCIPLINE, on the ruins of the established hierarchy. So unreasonable a pretension naturally alarmed and exasperated those who had power in their hands, and had their prejudices too, not less violent than those, by which the *Puritans* (for that was the name they went by) were possessed. The consequence was what might be expected. A *toleration* for their discipline out of the establishment, which was all they should have aimed at, and to which they had a right, would not have satisfied them ; and their

their iniquitous claim of *Dominion* was too naturally repaid by penal laws and compulsive statutes: that is, one sort of tyranny was repressed and counteracted by another. And thus matters continued through several reigns; till some more pressing claims of civil liberty, mixing with these struggles for church-dominion, overthrew, in the end, the antient ecclesiastical government; drove the bishops from their sees, the liturgy from our churches, and brought in the classical regimen, enforced, in its turn, as the episcopal one had been, with the rigours of persecution.

Still, the restless spirit of the times continuing, or rather increasing, this new model was forced to give way to another, which assumed the more popular name of *Independency*; under whose broad wing a thousand sects sprung up, each more extravagant than other, till, in the end, all order in religious matters, and religion itself, disappeared, under the prevailing torrent of fanaticism and confusion.

Such is the brief, but just account of the religious factions of those days: from which we collect how miserably the zealots for religious liberty defeated their own aims; or rather how wickedly they contended for power and libertinism, under the mask of liberty: An evil, which could not have happened, had they paid the least regard to the Apostle's injunction of *being free, but not as using their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness.*

II. The

II. The claims of CIVIL LIBERTY (which sprung up amid this rage of religious parties) were better founded; were for a time carried on more soberly; and, as was fitting, were, at first, attended with better success.

The mixed form of the English government, originally founded on the principles of liberty, had, from many concurring causes, degenerated into a kind of monarchical despotism, which an unquestionably virtuous, but misinformed and misguided Prince, was for moulding into a regular system. Happily the growing light and spirit of the times excited a general impatience of that project; and produced a steady and constitutional opposition to it. The distresses of government aided the friends of liberty, who managed their advantage so well as, in process of time, to support their claims, redress their grievances, establish their rights, and, in a word, to reduce the Crown, from the exorbitances it affected, within the antient and legal boundaries of the Constitution.

This the patriots of that time effected; with great advantage to their country, and with singular honour to themselves. Nothing indeed could have equalled their glory, had their labours in the cause of liberty stopped there. But, besides that some means employed by them, in the prosecution of their best-intended services, cannot be justified; the intention itself of many of them, hitherto so pure, began to grow corrupt; their fears and passions transported them too far; their public ends degenerated into selfish: having vindicated the constitu-

tion, their own security, or some worse motive, prompted them to make free with it, that is, to commit the very fault they had so justly resented at the hands of their Sovereign : In a word, the patriots, in their turn, insulted the Crown, and invaded the Constitution.

The particulars are well known. Ambitious leaders arose, or the old leaders in the popular cause turned ambitious. Unconstitutional claims were made : unconstitutional schemes were meditated : what before was self-defence and sober policy, was, now, revenge and hate : the nation grew delirious, and the civil war followed.

The rest is recorded in the disgusting annals of those times. Six desolating years brought on the subversion of the monarchy ; and (as if the victors meant to insult the law itself) by I know not what forms of mock-justice, the bloody scene was wantonly closed with the public arraignment, trial, condemnation, and execution of the monarch.

The tragedy of this day was the last insolent triumph of pretended liberty. What followed, was the most avowed tyranny ; upheld for a while by force and great ability, but terminating at length in wild and powerless anarchy.

Such, again, were the miserable consequences of not observing the Apostle's rule of *being free, but not as using liberty for a cloak of maliciousness*. Freedom was, first, justly sought after, and happily obtained : It was, then, made the cover of every selfish

selfish and malicious passion, till the wearers of it were enabled to throw it off, as an useless disguise ; when bare-faced tyranny and licentious misrule were seen to emerge from beneath this specious mantle of public liberty.

The RESTORATION, which followed, redeemed these nations from some part of the miseries, which their madness had brought on themselves. But for the full establishment of our civil and religious rights, we were finally and chiefly indebted to the REVOLUTION.

From that memorable æra, we became, in every sense of the word, a free people. Conscience was secured in the exercise of it's just rights by a legal toleration : and the civil constitution was restored to it's integrity.

III. Such are the observations, which the sad story of the times, we have been reviewing, obviously suggests to us. And now let us pause a little : And having before us what the nation so long suffered, and what it so late acquired ; that is, the horrors of fanatical tyranny, on the one hand, and the blessings of established order and freedom, on the other ; let us inquire dispassionately what improvements we have made of both. Have the black pages of our annals given us a just abhorrence of the principles and practices, which brought that cloud over them ? And have the bright ones, which so happily at length succeeded, affected our hearts and lives, as, in all reasonable expectation, they ought ? In particular, (to keep the momentous admonition of my text

in full view) has the most perfect LIBERTY, civil and religious, been acknowledged with that thankfulness, it calls for, or been enjoyed with that sobriety, which so inestimable a gift of heaven should naturally inspire?

1. To begin with RELIGIOUS liberty.

Has this great privilege, so rightfully belonging to us, as men, as Protestants, and as Christians, which so many ages had panted after, and the last so happily obtained, Has this invaluable acquisition been employed by us to the promotion of it's proper ends, the cultivation of just inquiry, and manly piety? On the contrary, has not the right of private judgment been abused to the worst of purposes, The open profession of libertinism in principle, and it's consequent encouragement of all corruption in practice? Has not religious liberty been the *cloak*, under which revealed and even natural religion has been insulted; infidelity, and even atheism, avowed; and the most flagitious tenets, propagated among the people? In a word, has not every species of what is called *free-thinking*, *free-speaking*, and *free-writing*, been carried to an extreme?

But to come to those, who are not guilty of these excesses; have *we*, all of us, made the proper use of the fostering liberty we enjoy in religious matters? Have we been careful to apply it to the purpose of dispassionately studying the sacred scriptures; of investigating their true sense with a due veneration for the high authority, they claim, and for the awful subjects, they set before us; and of maintaining our conclusions from them

with a becoming modesty, which in such inquiries can hardly be too great? Have we betrayed no symptoms of bigotry even in disclaiming it? Are we ready to indulge that candour to others, which we so justly expect ourselves? And is the public wisdom itself treated by those, who speculate, at their ease, under the most tolerant establishment of Christianity, that ever existed, Has it been treated, I do not say, with a blind submission (God forbid!) but with that decent respect, which is surely due to it? In short, have we, in our several situations and characters, been careful to exert the full spirit of Christian charity, which, one is ready to think, should naturally spring up from Christian liberty; or, at least, to observe that temper of mutual forbearance, which should seem to be an easy as well as reasonable duty, now that all unjust restraints and provoking severities are withdrawn?

2. Thus much for our religious liberties. Have our **CIVIL**, on which we equally, and with good reason, value ourselves, been secured from all abuse? Have we that reverence of just authority, not only as lodged in the persons of inferior magistrates, or in the sacred person of the supreme Magistrate, but as residing in the **LAW** itself (in which the public will, that is, the whole collective authority of the State is, as it were, concentrated), Have we, I say, that ingenuous and submissive respect for this authority, which not only reason and religion, but true policy, and every man's proper interest requires? Our boasted Constitution itself, now so accurately defined and generally understood, Does it meet with that awful regard from us, which it justly deserves? Are we anxious, that, of it's several

parts, each should have it's full play, without interfering with any other? And are we sufficiently on our guard against a spirit of innovation, which, after all our experience, can have no probable view of effecting much good, but may easily do unforeseen and irreparable mischief? It is true, in the less perfect forms of government, alterations may not be so sensibly felt. But in a Polity, like our's, so nicely and artificially adjusted, and, like a well-constructed arch, held together by the intimate relation and mutual pressure of its several parts, the removal or even change of any one may loosen the connexion of the rest, and, by disjoining the whole fabrick, bring it unexpectedly on our heads.

Let me, then, repeat the momentous question. Have we that religious reverence for the Constitution which it's value, its authority, it's compact and harmonious contexture, so evidently demands? And, when it hath bestowed upon us the blessings of civil liberty, in as full measure, as is perhaps consistent with government itself, are we only solicitous to preserve it pure, enjoy it thankfully, and transmit it, unimpaired by hasty and hazardous experiments, to the generations to come?

If to these, and other questions of the like sort, we can answer to our satisfaction, it is well. If we cannot, we should lay hold on the present occasion of recollecting the miscarriages and the miseries of past times, and of regulating our conduct by the instructive lessons, which they read to us. We shall see in every instance, I have suggested to you, how the abuse of religious and civil liberty kept operating in those days, till it produced.

produced the ruin and the loss of both—the *irreparable* loss, if it had not pleased a gracious providence to be much kinder to us, than we deserved, or had reason to expect.

Not to profit by this experience would be *inexcusable*; especially, when the date of it is so recent, and when *this* solemn day of humiliation (for that purpose kept up by authority) so affectingly reminds us of it. We cannot, if we reflect on what it sets before us, but see in the most convincing manner, that, to reap the benefits of the best government, we must, ourselves, be moderate and wise; and that *to use our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness* is, at once, the greatest impiety in those, who profess themselves *the servants of God*, and the greatest folly in those who are, and would continue to be, a *free* and happy people.



produced the man and the loss of both—their respective loss, it
 is hard not to feel a certain reluctance to be introduced to
 us, and we desire to be introduced to us.

Not to produce this experience would be impossible: when
 early, when the date of it is known, and when it is known
 that it is a matter of fact that it is a matter of fact, to
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 nature of the matter, but find in the most convincing manner, that it
 is the basis of the best government we must consider, in
 modern and what is the great theory for a change of
 things, at once, the great inquiry in that, who produce
 themselves the former of God, and the greatest ally in that
 who are, and would continue to be, a free and happy people.

